

CLAIMS

1. An information retrieval/distribution system comprising:

5 an information retrieval request unit for requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information which are scattered on a network; and

a plurality of database management units for managing databases in which said several kinds of information are stored,

10 wherein each of said plurality of database management units has management information about the databases which are managed by each database management unit, and has management information about the databases which are managed by other database management units
15 which can be connected to said each database management unit through said network; and

20 wherein when a retrieval criterion is input to said information retrieval request unit, one of said plurality of database management units, based on said management information in one database management unit, retrieves the information in the databases managed by said one database management unit, and requests any other database management unit managing the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion
25 is stored, to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit, thereby distributing the information corresponding to said retrieval criterion to the information retrieval request source.

30 2. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit manages a plurality of databases and can register the kinds of said plurality of databases as management information and, when the information
35 retrieval is requested by said information retrieval request source, said one database management unit retrieves said plurality of databases to collect the

required information, and then changes the data format of the collected information to a unified format and distributes the collected information to said information retrieval request source.

5 3. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the function of requesting said other database management unit to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit followed by receiving the result of the retrieval of
10 said information from said other database management unit to distribute said result to said information retrieval request source.

15 4. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one manager has at least one of:

the functions of including the list of the management information possessed by said other database management unit in the management information of said one database management unit; comparing the management
20 information of the database management unit which has been newly requested to retrieve the required information by said one database management unit with the management information of said one database management unit to
25 obtain the difference between said both management information; and updating the management information of said one database management unit, based on said difference;

and the function of communicating with
30 said other database management unit periodically and exchanging the management information with said other database management unit each other to update the management information of said one database management unit.

35 5. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the functions of:

making category information which defines the categories of the databases managed by said one database management unit; and

5 designating a database management unit managing the database in the same category to exchange the information with said database management unit, based on said category information.

10 6. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the functions of:

 designating retrieving items of the information in the databases managed by said one database management unit through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit; and

15 requesting said other database management unit to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit.

20 7. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the function of requesting automatically said other database management unit managing the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored, to retrieve said information, in the case in which said one database management unit does not designate any retrieving item through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit.

25 8. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the functions of:

30 designating a category through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit; and

35 connecting said one database management unit automatically to said other database management unit managing the database in said category to select said database in said category.

9. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the functions of:

5 registering the retrieval information of
said information retrieval request source;
 executing the same retrieval periodically,
based on said retrieval information; and
 sending the result of the retrieval to
said information retrieval request source.

10 10. A computer readable storage medium storing:
 a means which retrieves the information in
the databases managed by one of database management
units, based on the management information in one
database management unit, when a retrieval criterion is
15 input to an information retrieval request unit for
requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information
which are scattered on a network; and

 a means which requests any other database
management unit which is able to be connected to said one
20 database management unit through said network, to
retrieve the information in the database in which the
information related to said retrieval criterion is stored
and which is managed by said other database management
unit, based on the management information about the
25 databases managed by said other database management unit.

 11. A program for information
retrieval/distribution allowing a computer, in order to
retrieve information and distribute said information to
the information retrieval request source, to operate as:
30 a means which retrieves the information in
the databases managed by one of database management
units, based on the management information in one
database management unit, when a retrieval criterion is
input to an information retrieval request unit for
35 requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information
which are scattered on a network; and

 a means which requests any other database

- management unit which can be connected to said one database management unit, through said network, to retrieve the information in the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored
- 5 and which is managed by said other database management unit, based on the management information about the databases which are managed by said other database management unit.

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